Figures
Theodor W. Adorno is highly renowned. But although he is well known, it is not clear that he is genuinely recognised for what is essential about him. A stubborn legend has it that his work is primarily that of a philosopher with a passion for aesthetics and literary criticism, who turned aside from Marxism after the Second World War by abandoning any prospect of social transformation. In reality, if Adorno did indeed break with the Marxisms that emerged after Marx, he did not renounce the idea of a society freed from exploitation and oppression. It might even be said that his whole œuvre, even in its most aesthetic manifestations, is centred on a search for adequate means of emancipation and liberation following the historical failures of the workers’ movement.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, these failures are set in the more general context of the development of the culture of the bourgeois era – the self-destruction of reason with its renunciation of the project of creating meaning between, and, for human beings. For Adorno, the workers’ movement and Marxists have themselves been trapped in this regressive spiral, this transformation of reason into mythology. Thus, the theory of emancipation itself needs to be resumed and rethought. In this radical reform, Marx himself must not be spared, for a ‘hidden positivism’